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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

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July 19, 2013

General Martin Dempsey
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
9999 Joint Staff, Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20318-9999

Dear Chairman Dempsey:

We would appreciate if you would respond promptly to the attached questions.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,



John McCain



Carl Levin

Syria

1. What is your assessment of the costs, benefits, and risks associated with training and arming vetted elements of the Syrian opposition? In your view, could such action alone be sufficient to adequately build the military capability of the moderate opposition in Syria and create the necessary conditions for the Administration's stated policy objective—Bashar al-Assad's departure and a negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria—to succeed?
2. What limited kinetic military options exist, short of establishing a nation-wide No-Fly Zone in Syria, that might shift the military balance of power against the regime and create the necessary conditions for the Administration's stated policy objective—Bashar al-Assad's departure and a negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria—to succeed? Please provide your assessment of the costs, benefits, and risks associated with each of these options.
3. Specifically, does the United States have the capacity, using stand-off weaponry that would not require destruction of Syria's air defenses, to significantly diminish or limit the Assad regime's ability to use air power, ballistic missiles and heavy artillery, particularly against areas of Syria under opposition control? Would diminishing or limiting the regime's capacity to use such weapons shift the balance of power in a way that advances the Administration's stated policy objective? What is your assessment of the costs, benefits, and risks associated with this approach? What countries might join us in support of such an effort and with what effect?
4. Which of the options that you have identified, if any, do you believe would be sufficient to shift the military balance of power against the regime and create the necessary conditions for the Administration's stated policy objective—Bashar al-Assad's departure and a negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria—to succeed? What is your assessment of the costs and risks associated with taking such actions?
5. You testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee on February 12, 2013 that you had advised the President to arm vetted units of the Syrian opposition. On April 17, 2013, you testified to this Committee that you no longer supported doing that.
 - a. In your view, have the costs, benefits, and risks associated with this approach changed over time, and if so, how?
 - b. What is your current view on whether the United States should arm such units and why?
6. Considering only military factors, what is your professional military judgment as to whether the benefits of limited kinetic military action in Syria would outweigh the costs of such action? What other, non-military factors are you aware of that might be weighed by decision-makers in determining whether or not to take such an approach?

Afghanistan

1. Do you believe the military campaign in Afghanistan, especially the development of Afghan National Security Forces, is succeeding on the ground?
2. Do you believe it is appropriate to accept the risk of drawing down half of our combat force in Afghanistan by February or March of next year, just a few weeks before the country's presidential election?
3. Do you believe we have national security interests in Afghanistan that justify an enduring presence of U.S. forces beyond 2014?
4. Do you believe it is in the U.S. national security interest that a reconciliation agreement be concluded with the Taliban by December 31, 2014?
5. Do you believe that the incentives exist at this time for the Taliban to reach a reconciliation agreement that would serve U.S. national security interests in Afghanistan, including respect for the Afghan constitution?